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Home Freezing of Fruits and Vegetables

This guide offers suggestions on containers for freezing, packing, loading the freezer, freezing fruits, preparation, preventing fruit from darkening, freezing vegetables, and heating and cooling vegetables.

Freezing is a simple and easy way to preserve foods. Properly frozen fruit and vegetables are much like fresh foods in color, flavor and nutritive value. They will keep up to a year without losing their high quality.

Some varieties of fruits and vegetables freeze better than others. If you are not sure how well a fruit or vegetable will freeze, test it first by freezing three or four packages. Then sample the food after freezing. This only shows the effect of freezing, however, not the effect of storage.

As a rule, all vegetables that need to be cooked freeze well. Vegetables such as cucumbers, lettuce, radishes and tomatoes lose their crispness when frozen and become limp. Most fruits can be frozen successfully.

Containers for Freezing

Good containers keep frozen foods from drying out and preserve food value, color, flavor and texture. A good quality wrapping material or container is moisture-vapor resistant to prevent loss of liquid and flavor. It does not give a flavor of its own and is clean and durable.

Tempered glass, plastic, and heavily-waxed cardboard containers are suitable cartons for liquid packs. Heavy plastic bags, specifically developed for use in the freezer are best for dry-packed vegetables and fruits. Overwrap thin plastic packages with another plastic bag to prevent tears.

Select a size that holds only enough fruit or vegetables for one family meal. Seal the carton by pressing or screwing on the lid. Most plastic bags can be scaled by twisting and folding back the top of the bag and securing it with a string, rubber band or other sealing device.

Packing

Pack food tightly to cut down on the amount of air in the package. Air draws moisture from the food, resulting in a poor quality product. Allow ample headspace (1/2 to 1 inch) because food expands as it freezes. Seal carefully.

Label packages plainly. Include the name of the food, the date it was packed and the type of pack if it is packed in more than one form. There are gummed labels, colored tape, crayons and stamps made especially for labeling frozen food packages.

Loading the Freezer

Freeze fruits and vegetables as soon as they are packed and store them at 0° F for best quality.

Put no more unfrozen food into a home freezer than will freeze within 24 hours. This is usually two to three pounds of food to each cubic foot of freezer capacity. Overloading slows the rate of freezing, so foods may lose quality or spoil.

If power is interrupted, keep the freezer closed. Otherwise transfer your food to a locker or use dry ice if the freezer will be stopped for more than a day. Food in a loaded freezer will usually stay frozen for two days, even in summer.

Both fruits and vegetables may be refrozen if they have not been completely thawed. However, thawing and refreezing will usually result in a lowered quality and loss of flavor.

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Freezing Fruits

Most fruits can be frozen successfully. Use only perfect, fully ripe, sound fruits of good flavor and attractive color to make the most satisfactory frozen products. The quality of the frozen product will vary with the kind of fruit, the stage of maturity and the type of pack. Generally, the flavor of frozen fruit is good, but the texture may be somewhat softer than that of fresh fruit.

Preparation

All fruits need to be washed in cold water, a small quantity at a time. Do not let the fruit stand in water. Drain fruits thoroughly. Prepare enough fruit for only a few containers at one time.

The intended use helps decide whether to freeze the fruit whole, in pieces, juiced, crushed or pureed Small fruits and berries can be frozen whole. Large fruits are usually halved or sliced. Most fruits and berries can also be frozen crushed or as puree for use as fruit toppings or fillings. Good parts of less perfect fruits are suitable for purees. Juice pressed from fruit or berries can be sweetened slightly before freezing.

How To Pack

Most fruits have a better texture and flavor if they are packed in sugar or syrup. Some can be packed without sweetening. Fruits packed in syrup are generally best for dessert use; those packed in sugar or unsweetened are best for use in cooking.

Sugar Pack

Cut fruit into a bowl or shallow pan. Sprinkle sugar over the fruit. Use a large spoon or pancake turner to mix. Mix gently until the juice is drawn out and the sugar is dissolved. Put fruit and juice into containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace.

Syrup Pack

A 40 percent syrup is recommended for most fruits (see chart). Lighter syrups are desirable for some mild flavored fruits; heavier syrups may be needed for very sour fruits. It takes 1/2 to 2/3 cup of syrup for each pint of fruit.

Type of Sugar	Sugar	Water
30 percent (light)	2 cups	4 cups
35 percent (medium light)	2 1/2 cups	4 cups
40 percent (medium)	3 cups	4 cups
50 percent (heavy)	4 cups	4 cups

To make the syrup, dissolve the sugar in hot water and chill before using. Place the prepared fruit in sturdy, leak-proof containers and cover with syrup, leaving 1-inch headspace for expansion. Fruit has a tendency to float to the top where it changes color when exposed to the air. Therefore, to keep the fruit under the syrup, place a small piece of crumbled freezer paper on top and press the fruit down into syrup before closing the container.

Unsweetened Pack—Dry Pack

Some fruits such as raspberries, currants, figs, blueberries, gooseberries, cranberries, pineapple, rhubarb and strawberries freeze successfully without sugar. Crushed or sliced fruit can be packed in its own juice or covered with water containing ascorbic acid (vitamin C), available in pharmacies or grocery stores.

Fill containers to within 1 inch of the top. Fruit may also be dry packed--that is packed without added sugar or liquid. Fill containers to within 1/2 inch of the top.

How To Keep Fruit From Darkening

Ascorbic acid (vitamin C), available from drugstores or freezer-locker plants, can be added to prevent the darkening of light-colored fruits. Dissolve 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon of crystalline ascorbic acid in a little cold water. In the syrup pack, add the dissolved ascorbic acid to 1 quart of cold syrup shortly before using. In the sugar pack, sprinkle the dissolved ascorbic acid over the fruit just before adding the sugar. In the unsweetened pack, sprinkle the dissolved ascorbic acid over the fruit and mix thoroughly just before packing. If fruit is packed in water, dissolve the ascorbic acid in the water. Six (6) vitamin C tablets of 500 mg each can be crushed (equal to 1 teaspoon) and added to 1 quart of water. Vitamin C is used most often with apples, apricots, nectarines, peaches and pears.

There are special anti-darkening preparations on the market. If you use one of these, follow the manufacturer's directions or steam-blanch for 3-5 minutes, depending on the size of pieces. Plain lemon juice may also be used to prevent fruit from darkening, but is not as effective as ascorbic acid and may add its own flavor to the fruit.

How to prepare fruits for freezing

Fruit	Preparation	
* Apples	Slice. Steam 1 1/2 to 2 minutes, or mix 1/4 to 1/2 cup sugar with 1 quart apples or cover with 40 percent syrup.	
Applesauce	Cook and cool. Sweeten to taste.	
*Apricots	Heat 30 seconds and cool immediately. Peel, pit and halve. Mix 1/2 cup sugar with 1 quart of fruit, or cover with 30 percent syrup.	
Avocados, Persimmons	Peel and mash. Use only ripe varieties.	
Berries	Pack dry without sugar or syrup, or mix 3/4 cup sugar with 1 quart berries, or cover with 40 or 50 percent syrup.	
Cherries, sour	Mix 3/4 cup sugar with I quart of pitted cherries	
*Cherries, sweet	t Cover with 40 percent syrup.	
Coconut	Puncture and drain out milk, remove meat and shred. Cover meat with coconut milk.	
Cranberries	Pack dry without sugar or syrup. Currants, Wash and remove stems, dry pack, no Gooseberries sugar.	
*Grapefruit, Oranges	Peel and section. Cover with 40 percent syrup.	
Grapes	Wash and stem—dry pack.	
Melons	Remove seeds and cut into slices, cubes or balls. Cover with 30 percent syrup.	
Nectarines	Wash and pit. Cover with 40 percent syrup. These may not freeze as well as other fruits.	
*Peaches	Halve or slice. Mix 2/3 cup sugar with 1 quart of fruit, or cover with 40 percent syrup.	
Pears	Use firm Bartlett Pears (not winter varieties). Cover during preparation. Cover with 40 percent syrup.	
Pineapple	Slice, dice or cut into pieces. Pack without sugar, or cover with 30 percent syrup.	
Plums, Prunes	Wash. May leave pits in. Cover with 40 percent syrup.	
Raspberries	Wash carefully. Drain and dry pack.	
Rhubarb	Cut into pieces and pack dry.	
Strawberries	Slice or crush. Mix 3/4 cup sugar with 1quart of berries, or pack whole without sugar or syrup.	

^{*}Add ascorbic acid or commercial an anti-darkening preparation to these fruits to prevent darkening.

Freezing Vegetables

Fresh, tender vegetables right from the garden are best for freezing. The fresher the vegetables when frozen, the more satisfactory your product.

Preparation

As soon as possible after the vegetables are picked, wash them thoroughly in cold water and sort according to size. Freeze only prime and tender young vegetables. Peel, trim and cut into pieces as desired. Heat or blanch to stop or slow enzyme action. For some vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower, soak 1/2 hour in a solution of 1 tablespoon salt to 1 quart of water to draw out possible insects. Discard insects. Wash again in fresh water to get rid of salt.

Heating

For home freezing, the best way to heat nearly all vegetables is in boiling water. This process is usually called blanching. Use at least 1 gallon of boiling water for each pound of prepared vegetables. Put the vegetables in a wire basket and lower into the boiling water. Put a lid on the kettle and start counting the time immediately. Keep the heat high for the time given in the chart for the vegetable you are freezing. The length of time will vary according to the thickness of the stem or piece.

Cooling

After vegetables are blanched, cool them quickly and thoroughly to stop the cooking. Plunge them immediately into a large quantity of cold water. Change water frequently, use cold running water or iced water. Cool the vegetables about the same amount of time used to blanch them. When the vegetables are cool, remove them from the water and drain.

Packing

Vegetables for freezing may be packed either dry or in brine. Dry pack is used most often.

Pack the vegetables immediately into a suitable container, leaving 1/2-inch headspace, except for vegetables such as asparagus an broccoli that pack loosely and require no headspace. Seal the packages, label and store them in freezer.

How to prepare vegetables for freezing

Vegetable	Preparation	Time for Blanching
Asparagus	Leave as spears or cut in 2-inch pieces	2 minutes for small stalks, 4 minutes for large stalks
Beans, lima	Shell and sort for size	Small - 2 minutes Medium - 3 minutes Large - 4 minutes
Beans, fresh shell	Shell and sort	1 minute
Beans, green, wax, or Italian	Cut in pieces or slice lengthwise	3 minutes
Beets	Boil until tender, then slice or dice	
Broccoli	Split lengthwise	3 minutes
Brussel sprouts	Soak and trim	Small - 2 minutes Large - 5 minutes
Cabbage	Use only in cooked dishes. Cut in wedges.	1-1/2 minutes
Carrots	Scrape, slice, dice or leave small ones whole	2 minutes for diced or slice, 5 minutes for whole
Cauliflower	Cut into pieces about 1 inch across	3 minutes
Celery	Cut into 1 inch pieces	3 minutes
Corn, whole kernel or cream style	Husk, silk, scald, then cut	4 minutes
Corn on the cob	Husk, silk and sort according to size	7 to 11 minutes
Eggplant	Dice or cut into strips	4 minutes in 1 gallon of water containing 1/2 cup of lemon juice
Greens	Remove tough stems and cut as desired	2 to 3 minutes
Okra	Cutt off ends	3 minutes for small pods
Parsnips	Slice	2 minutes
Peas, black-eyed	Shell and use only tender peas	2 minutes

Vegetable	Preparation	Time for Blanching
Peas, green	Shell	1-1/2 minutes
Peppers, green	Slide or dice	None—does not require blanching
Pumpkin and Sweet potatoes	Cook and mash	None—does not require blanching
Rutabagas and Turnips	Cut in 1/2 inch cubes	2 minutes
Soybeans	Wash bright green pods	5 minutes. Squeeze beans out of pods when cool
Summer squash (zucchini, yellow crookneck)	Cut in 1/2 inch slides	3 minutes
Tomatoes (stewed)	Remove cores and ends - cook 10 to 12 minutes	
Tomato juice	Cut in quarters; simmer 5-10 minutes. Press through sieve. Season.	
Turnips	Cut into cubes and freeze or cook and mash	
Winter squash (acorn, butternut)	Cook and mash, or cook and freeze in pieces	

^{*}Note: Time for blanching is for boiling water blanching unless otherwise states.

At High Altitudes

Blanch vegetables by boiling rather than by steaming. Add 1 minutes of blanching time for every 1000 feet above 7000 feet. Refer to chart—How to prepare vegetables for freezing.